The Post-War Issei
— A History of Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Southern California, 1949-1990s —

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By focusing on the history of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Southern California, this paper examines how the first generation Japanese immigrants (Issei) mattered to the postwar Japanese American community. This paper analyzes the documents of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Southern California under three headings: 1) the organizational structure – its memberships and activities; 2) the community relationship – mostly focusing on rising tensions with the younger generation over the management of community affairs; and 3) the Issei leaders’ ideas and visions – both the changing and the unchanging elements carried over from the prewar era.

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Introduction

On September 5th, 1947, at the small restaurant ‘Khonanro’ in Little Tokyo, Los Angeles, a group of forty-eight persons, mostly Issei, first generation Japanese immigrants, announced the establishment of a new organization of Japanese Americans in Southern California.

Little Tokyo in Greater Los Angeles has, since the days before the war, been a hub for our people and now that twenty-five thousand Japanese have returned in the two years since the war ended it will soon be prosperous again. Yet, since our community lost its foundations, we do not, at the moment, have anything to support us. So, in order to do our best to take over community projects and to deal with the postwar situation, our considered opinion is that we need an authorized organization that will, as the bedrock on which our community will rest, be able to take responsibility for our community. At present we have to manage a great range of community issues, such as the planning and building of a nursery school, an old people’s home, and a Japanese language school, redeveloping our Little Tokyo, and working to create a society committed to inter-racial and ethnic cooperation. ¹)

While they admitted, in part of the declaration, that the Japanese American Citizens’ League, an organization dominated by Nisei, the second generation Japanese, would be able to play a leading role as prospective community organization in the

postwar community, the Issei leaders still insisted on founding a “more authorized, authentic and perpetual” organization for the local Japanese American community. This was finally and formally established in 1949 as the Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Southern California (JCCSC).2)

This paper focuses on the postwar organization created by the Issei of Los Angeles, and it will examine how the prewar memory and experience continued to have influence yet undergo change in the postwar Japanese American community. In postwar Japanese American historical studies, the argument of the prewar experience converges primarily on the redress movement.3) To be sure, these studies show us how the Issei’s prewar experience functioned in the Issei’s postwar identity-making, but their perspectives reflect only one aspect of Japanese American history – how Japanese Americans were ultimately integrated into the mainstream American society.

More recent studies, on the other hand, have attempted to analyze Japanese American history from the perspective of trans-nationalism. As Eiichiro Azuma has suggested, from the “inter-National” perspective, the prewar Japanese immigrants, the Issei in particular, were wavering between two nations: their bodies and minds, loyalty, racial identity and citizenship extended beyond the national boundaries and were sometimes ripped apart by such bi-national relationships.4) Postwar Japanese American historical studies simply overlook this: they fail to examine the postwar Japanese American community from the point of view of its relationship with Japan, not only postwar but prewar Imperial Japan.

Analysis through Transnational Perspective

In their discussion of the identity formation of immigrants of the United States, earlier studies look at the situation from two very different perspectives – assimilation theory and ethnic identity theory. The assimilationist perspective believes that at some stage of life in the United States Japanese immigrants lose their sense of identity as “Japanese”, and it is certainly true that after the Issei were granted U.S. citizenship in the 1950s, assimilation gained momentum. The ethnic identity theory, on the other hand, holds the view that Japanese immigrants preserve their sense of identity or the cultural tools that identify them as “Japanese” for several generations or more. At the level of citizenship, it would therefore seem that according to either theory every Japanese immigrant can be an American, although, in contrast to the view of assimilation theory, ethnic identity theory describes those who have Japanese ancestry as “Japanese-Americans”, and the researchers put the emphasis on “Japanese”.

Both, however, take a common stand when they discuss identity issues since

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3) Yasuko Takezawa, Nikkei Amerikajin no Ethnicity: Kyoseisyuyo to hoshoundou niyoru hensen (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1994).
5) See Gordon, Assimilation in American Life; Higham, Strangers in the Land.
they do so within a framework of one nation — the United States. They do not consider the relationship that may be preserved between the immigrants and their homeland, politically, economically, or in the formation of identity. The transnational perspective, on the other hand, considers how the bi-national relationship continues to influence the immigrants' communities and their lives — political alliances, economic status or conditions, and a sense of identity. No immigrant to the United States ever quite severs the ties to his or her homeland, keeping or building up the connections between the immigrants' communities and the homeland that lies beyond the newly acquired national borders. It can be said that the transnational perspective adds an analytic level to the “national” level in considering immigrant identity formation theories, which, in prior studies, were analyzed at the level of citizenship and ethnicity.

Throughout the last century, Japan has always mattered to Japanese immigrants in the United States. Prewar Imperial Japan provided a financial basis for the Japanese Associations in the United States so as to evoke and encourage a nationalistic movement in Japanese immigrant communities as the U.S.-Japan relationship seriously soured. In the 1910s, Japanese people entering the United States needed the immigration cards issued by the Japanese Government, although when immigration began no such procedures were required. The Japanese Government granted the Japanese Associations the right to levy taxes, which provided a stable financial basis for the Associations. Indeed, the leaders of the immigrant communities shared the nationalistic ideals and the strategy of political and business circles in Japan. The Japanese Association of Los Angeles, one of the most powerfully nationalistic associations in the USA, was, in postwar times, reborn as the Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Southern California. As a result, postwar Japanese immigrant communities continued to maintain strong ties with Japan, a situation that led to a certain amount of conflict amongst the generations.

The Japanese Chamber of Commerce of California

The Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Southern California, an organization that the surviving Issei leaders formed in postwar Southern California was, as a matter of fact, a direct descendant of “the Central Japanese Association”, which had been the most powerful of organizations at arousing nationalist sentiments in the prewar Japanese immigrant communities, cooperating closely with Imperial Japan. In organizing the JCCSC, the Issei leaders attempted to re-establish their power, and an analysis of the JCCSC ought, therefore, to be able to answer the questions “What became of the legacy of Imperial Japan in the postwar community?” and “How did Japanese American community relate to postwar Japan?”

In prior studies of postwar Japanese American history, the scholars have left totally unexamined the JCCSC, which has led them to come to inadequate conclusions about how and why the postwar Japanese American community maintained ties with Japan. Japanese political and business circles continued to have strong concerns about the Japanese American community particularly in the West, and

6) See Azuma, Between Two Empires, 5-7.
tried to edge into such local community affairs as the Little Tokyo Redevelopment Project, which started in the 1960s. Their intervention provoked conflict within the neighborhood community, and local newspapers, including such non-ethnic papers as the L.A. Times, stirred up a controversy. This was the first time that disorder inside the ethnic community came to public notice.

Lon Kurashige summed up a series of conflicts between the local community and Japanese corporations who aimed at investing in Little Tokyo’s redevelopment projects as simply one between the local/ethnic community and the corporations’ internationalism\(^7\), but Miya S. Sichinohe critiqued this view and explored the cooperation rather than conflict between Nisei and Japanese businessmen in the Little Tokyo Redevelopment Project. Yet because these studies have lacked a historical perspective that can view the matter from prewar to postwar times, issues of why and how the local community continued to be linked to Japan remained unclarified.\(^8\) Indeed, many scholars do not consider Issei as an integral part of postwar Japanese American history, and most rely on the premise that the Japanese American community consists of Nisei and Sansei just because the postwar Issei population was proportionately small. This shortsightedness consequently fails to capture those divisions and intergenerational tensions within the community that became increasing evidently after the war.

This paper uses the organization’s documents, some of which remain in private hands, and the author’s access to them has enabled her to analyze postwar Japanese American History through the structure of the organization, a feature that prior studies do not focus on. Such a structure-based analysis as this paper offers gives us firstly a more clear-sighted view of the changing character of Japanese American society. Secondly, it brings out what was actually going on in a series of affrays over the Little Tokyo Redevelopment Project in which the Issei leaders, the younger generation of Japanese Americans, came into conflict with the Japanese corporations over what ‘our’ community was or to which community Little Tokyo belonged. This turmoil in the postwar Japanese American community has often been discussed by researchers, but because they mainly used newspapers which never had a clear understanding of what was actually going on between the Issei leaders and Japanese political/business leaders, their analysis remained incomplete. What mattered rather more in shaping the redevelopment project was the relationship between the key personnel, how they connected or how they acted. The documents used in this paper can help to make these relationships much clearer.

This paper will analyze the documents of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Southern California under three headings: 1) the organizational structure – its memberships and activities; 2) the community relationship – mostly focusing on rising tensions with the younger generation over the management of community affairs; and 3) the Issei leaders’ ideas and visions – both the changing and the un-


changing elements carried over from the prewar era.

1. Reorganizing The First Generation Japanese Organization

From the Central Japanese Association to the JCCSC

The Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Southern California is not just an ordinary businessmen's association. When we explore its historical roots, we discover the close link that bound together the JCCSC and the Central Japanese Association. Issei leaders in the Central Japanese Association boosted nationalistic activities and built up solidarity within the prewar Japanese immigrant community in order to resist anti-Japanese sentiments based on racial discrimination under conditions of worsening U.S.-Japan relationships. The Central Japanese Association had close connections with Imperial Japan and worked as the empire’s main American hub. When the surviving leaders returned from the internment camps, they revived the Association and it was reincarnated as the Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Southern California.

A Japanese Chamber of Commerce in Southern California existed in prewar times, and was formally known as the Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Los Angeles. It had been established in 1916 by Japanese immigrant businessmen who were running small businesses in the eastern part of Downtown Los Angeles (later called Little Tokyo). The purposes of the organization were practical (economical), political and cultural. Firstly, they attempted to help individual businessmen cooperate with each other economically to expand the Japanese business community in Little Tokyo; secondly, to protest for their political rights; thirdly, as a cultural program, to inspire entrepreneurship, thought to be lacking in Japanese nationals, and so turn them into local Japanese immigrant businessmen.9)

Yet despite their efforts, they were able neither to increase membership constantly nor to succeed in persuading individual businessmen to work together effectively, with the result that, in 1931, the Chamber was integrated into the Japanese Association of Los Angeles, a local branch of the Central Japanese Association. This was partly because some of the actors were leading members of both organizations, but, actually, the main reason was the Immigration Act of 1924; because this law banned the entry of any new Japanese immigrants into the United States, the Chamber could not rely on any further increase in memberships, while, in addition, only a small number of the members had participated in the ordinary activities of the Chamber. Indeed, from the beginnings of the organization, most of the local Japanese businessmen had shown no interest in cooperation.10)

On their return from internment after the war, their harsh wartime experience made it difficult for the Issei leaders to rebuild the Central Japanese Association.11)

As the wartime situation had begun to grow serious, the U.S. authorities, ever vigilant against the nationalistic activities of the Association, began shrewdly to monitor some of the leading members of the Central Japanese Association. Soon after the war broke out and the internment of Japanese people began, the leaders of Japanese organizations including the Central Japanese Association were immediately arrested and kept in strict isolation away from ordinary Japanese persons. They bore the brunt of the bi-national conflict since they were regarded as symbolic harbingers of the expansionism of Imperial Japan.

Despite a recurring fear that the humiliating experiences of prewar times might be repeated, the surviving Issei leaders were eager to create an organization of their own that would be a genuine substitute for the Central Japanese Association. To retain the community leadership in their hands, it was imperative for them to restore the association to a state in which Issei could play the major role in managing community affairs, just as in the days of the prewar Japanese immigrant community. As a result, they named their organization “The Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Southern California” rather than “The Central Japanese Association”, a name they actually intended one day to bring back.

**Analysis of JCCSC Leaders and Membership Structure**

If we begin by analyzing the generational background of individual JCCSC leaders and the organization’s membership, it becomes obvious that although the Issei were the smallest segment of the postwar Japanese American population, they controlled the JCCSC.

According to the historical membership data, twenty members served as head of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Southern California from 1949 to 1984. Fifteen of them were Issei. The average birth year of the fifteen Issei leaders was 1894 and the most common year for their entering the United States was 1911. Two of the leaders also counted as Shin-Issei. Shin-Issei was the first generation to migrate after WWII. The average birth year of the other remaining Nisei leaders was 1913.\(^{12}\)

In 1968, the membership of the JCCSC was at its largest: it boasted approximately 600 members in all. Among the 316 members whose birth places could be confirmed, 221 were born in Japan.\(^ {13} \) Furthermore, each successive head of the JCCSC was a member of that same generation.\(^ {14} \) It is obvious that the majority of the JCCSC membership was the surviving first generation who was quite a small segment of the postwar community. By the middle of the century, the Japanese American immigrant community had already experienced a major generational shift – from Issei to Nisei.

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\(^{13}\)JCCSC, “Annual Report” (1968), 108-120.

\(^{14}\)ibid., 155.
Table 1 illustrates the membership structure by the members’ occupation for the years 1920, 1968 and 1983. An analysis of the changing structure shows that although in 1920 the Japanese Chamber of Commerce had been an organization for local businessmen, in the postwar years the ordinary Japanese businessmen from the local area no longer provided the fundamental core of the membership. We can see this from the following figures:

Firstly, in 1920, more than half of the members practiced retail and wholesale trades of both the agricultural and non-agricultural kind in which most of the Japanese immigrant self-employed and hired workers were engaged. In the postwar years, however, members drawn from these occupations were obviously shrinking to about one-fourth (1968) and one-fifth (1983). At the same time, the proportion of members from the manufacturing industry dropped from 7.2% (1920) to 3.3% (1968) and 2.0% (1983), although we can observe in both 1968 and 1983 an increase in the number of corporate members. In 1983, employees of the FIRE industry and Japanese corporations accounted for one-fourth of the total membership.

Second, the figures reveal that the location of member’s businesses had moved from Little Tokyo to other parts of Los Angeles. In 1920, as many as 70% of the members ran businesses that were located in Little Tokyo; by 1968, the rate had decreased to about forty percent, and finally, by 1983, to less than thirty percent. While this shift in the location of the member’s businesses was caused partly by the economic stagnation of Little Tokyo where, in the postwar years, the absolute number of businesses was declining, it can also be said that the JCCSC failed to take in ordinary small Japanese businessmen simply because the organization might not

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<th>Table 1. Type of Industry of Members of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Southern California, 1920, 1968, 1983</th>
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<td><strong>Type of Industry</strong></td>
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be able to provide them with any useful and practical services. We may therefore conclude that the JCCSC was not the association for businessmen that its name suggests.

**Generational Issues in the JCCSC**

In the 1930s, the proportion of native-born and U.S.-born Japanese in the city of Los Angeles was almost equally balanced, and before the war, the population of the second generation was growing remarkably. Because of strict racial barriers in the work places, most of them had to depend on the first generation to make a living. An estimated 50 percent of the working second generation Japanese in 1940 worked within ethnic enclaves as farm laborers or sales workers, even though they were college graduates.\(^{15}\) In addition to the racial barriers, wartime hostility utterly thwarted the upward mobility of young Japanese. Eventually, once the war was over, the Nisei’s socio-economic status was ameliorated and their economic opportunities rose, and taking over the family business was neither the major means to make a living nor the way to climb successful economic ladders. Even though racial discrimination did not completely disappear, it became common for Nisei to look for jobs outside the ethnic community. The second generation Japanese were increasingly taking the initiative within the postwar community, and in the early 1950s, assisted by the Japanese American Citizen’s League, a Nisei’s civic organization, they helped the Issei to naturalize and obtain U.S. citizenship. Yet, as the declaration of the JCCSC establishment suggested, the Issei leaders did not have the slightest intention of giving way to young groups in leadership of the community. Rather, they took it for granted that the Nisei would become incorporated into the JCCSC.

Yet, contrary to their expectations, it was highly unlikely that the two generations could even work together for reasons that were mostly caused by differences in their attitudes and cultural values. First and foremost, the young Japanese American participants found the JCCSC’s conventional administrative methods odd, inefficient, and undemocratic. Since the early phase of the organization, the same executive members had maintained a firm hold on the levers of control in the management of the association and their hegemony persisted as long as they were alive and active. Only certain privileged members were recommended to elect the chairman and board of directors every year: the “recommender” had only unofficial status, but seized the real power in any decision-making.\(^{16}\)

Some of them had been former presidents of the Central Japanese Association, but only two bilingual lawyers, Gongoro Nakamura (the Central Japanese Association president in 1938 and 1939 and JCCSC head in 1952) and Katsuma Mukaeda (the Central Japanese Association president in 1933, 1934 and 1935 and JCCSC head in 1950-51 and 1963-64),\(^{17}\) were community leaders approved by both the American

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and Japanese governments. At the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, the U.S. authority arrested them at once along with other figures who were considered to have strong connections with the Japanese government. As soon as they returned from the harsh conditions of the Santa Fe internment camp, they immediately launched a community reconstruction programme by establishing the JCCSC as the new bedrock of the Japanese immigrant community, replacing the Central Japanese Association. Until his death in the late 1990s, Mukaeda retained leadership of the JCCSC, and continued to sustain strong ties with Japanese political and business magnates.

Criticism From Within

Yaemitsu Sugimachi, a pioneer of Japanese language education in Southern California and one of the disputants in the community, severely criticized the JCCSC: “The way the JCCSC works seems similar to the undemocratic voting procedure of the prewar Japan which was limited to the privileged class. The JCCSC should amend its constitution so that it can be managed by any member who pays the membership fees.”18) Another of his criticisms was directed at the JCCSC’s scholarship project for Japanese American students. He insisted that the scholarship should be awarded according to the judgment of the executive members at the committee, not by one or two influential persons. As a member of the JCCSC, Sugimachi denounced the executive committee for its secret, cliquish, and undemocratic ways of management under the control of only a small faction, yet his criticisms were not even argued over at committee meetings.19) It was not until several decades later, when, in the early 1980s, JCCSC memberships declined to two-thirds of what it had been in the 1960s, that a JCCSC leader finally suggested that they need more opportunities for communication between executives and ordinary members.20) The JCCSC’s practices confused even other Issei such as Sugimachi, let alone the Nisei. In the first place, the discord between the two generations was linguistic: since few members were bi-lingual and the two groups spoke either Japanese or English as their first language, the lack of mutual understanding caused friction and conflict. At the JCCSC’s annual conference of 1963, Mukaeda was applauded when he stated that they should use English at every meeting in order for both Nisei and Sansei to understand.21) While Mukaeda was exceptional in being one of the few who was bi-lingual, the JCCSC’s main language continued to remain Japanese-only for a long time.

II. Intergenerational Tensions Over Community Welfare

The Increasing Need for Community Welfare Behind the Prosperity

Right after the war, the community’s welfare work was one of the activities that

18) *Rafu Shimpo*, 1, 2, 3 August, 1960.
the JCCSC had been trying to organize effectively. Those who needed help concentrated in Little Tokyo and its surrounding residential areas, while most of Japanese Americans flew to the middle-class suburbs and got integrated into the mainstream American society and they were left poor and excluded from postwar prosperity. Although very little has been written about cleavage between the poor and the middle-class inside the community that emerged in the postwar Japanese American society, it must be noted that the poor group included retired Issei, besides the unemployed young and single mothers, most of whom were living alone in Little Tokyo’s shabby apartments. According to the 1969 survey of fifteen hotels and apartments of the area, more than 20 percent of the Japanese residents were retired, while 36 percent were 60 years and older. As many as 70 percent were male and living alone.\(^{22}\)

After the Christmas season of 1947, the JCCSC and other Japanese American groups launched a community fund-raising campaign to aid those who had financial difficulties in everyday life. As the disorder left by the war was sorted out, social welfare worker specified target groups, yet at the same time it became harder to obtain community-wide helps and interests, which reflected the expanding difference between the middle and lower classes of Japanese Americans. The lower class, including the Little Tokyo’s elderly, were estranged from the ordinary life of Japanese American society mostly because of their inability to speak English, which prevented them from receiving assistance from the city’s social welfare services.\(^{23}\)

In the JCCSC’s social welfare section, one Japanese Buddhist social worker was responsible for the management all by himself. In the 1960s, the number of persons needing help ranged from 2,000 to 8,000 per year – counseling, interpreting assistance, advice about social security services and so on.\(^{24}\) The JCCSC’s Japanese language dominance was helpful in assisting them to express their demands. Still, in some cases, both languages were needed when dealing with family discord between Japanese-speaking parents and English-speaking children. This incompatibility in language use often led to the lack of communication in Japanese American families.

### Issei’s JCCSC vs. Nisei’s JACS

Although it was not until the late 1960s that JCCSC recognized the necessity of providing bilingual services to cope with emerging community issues, it still failed to reach Little Tokyo.\(^{25}\) In place of the Issei’s JCCSC, the Japanese American Community Service (JACS), a Nisei’s social organization, was able to help with such problems. The JACS was organized in 1961 by a leading Nisei group that was relatively involved with community affairs, while most of younger generations were unconcerned about what was going on in Little Tokyo. The JCCSC leaders took a critical attitude towards this Nisei organization over planning and financing since

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\(^{22}\) Los Angeles City Clerks Archives.

\(^{23}\) Kasu Mainithi, 19 December 1965.


several years of its early life for the JACS was not able to work without JCCSC’s financial. In the late 1960s, however, JACS began to play a pivotal role in resolving increasing juvenile delinquency in which young Japanese Americans were partly involved. In 1971, as many as thirty Japanese Americans died of drug overdose.

This dealt the whole community such a grievous blow that many Japanese Americans who had been divided for a long time and had lost any sense of being a part of a community, finally became aware of how serious things were becoming in the local Japanese American community. To solve the juvenile delinquency issues since the 1930s which had in fact mattered to Japanese immigrant community, the JCCSC had asked religious groups in the community to cooperate at all times. In the late 1950s, they treated more opportunities for the discussion of such problems, holding community meetings at the Buddhist hall, but this time, they were too old to launch something new as an effective solution.

The JACS, supported by Sansei, promptly reacted to the crisis. They launched the program “JACS=Asian Involvement” in tandem with such other Asian American groups as “Yellow Brotherhood.” Since the wide-spreading drug-use among Asian American youth was neither exposed to public notice nor recognized as anything serious, Asian American communities did not receive any services from the social welfare programs of local government. The image that Asian Americans kept self-help functions inside their own communities still persisted in U.S. society.

The local government rarely extended assistance to Asian American communities. The unity of young Asian Americans achieved success both in taking the first step towards solving the actual problems and in appealing to the entire society to work together. They also held a number of community health fairs in downtown Los Angeles, aiming to take care of elderly people. Chinese, Filipinos and other Asian Americans, with a certain number of the aged, had senior care concerns. The poor senior citizens of many racial and ethnic groups tended to concentrate in downtown areas, and since they lived alone they needed assistance economically, physically, and linguistically.

The emergence of the Nisei’s community activities increasingly conflicted with the JCCSC leadership. In 1971, the JCCSC’s number one social worker suddenly left the JCCSC and transferred to the JACS, taking all the records that he had kept for a long time while working in the JCCSC’s social service. Besides this, the JACS members suggested to the people receiving JCCSC’s assistance that they should take the alternative offered by JACS instead. In a final attempt to reconstruct community welfare, the second generation leaders did not hesitate to confront JCCSC Issei leaders, directly. The JCCSC leaders insisted that they had always known the best way to cope with community issues, and because JACS lacked knowledge and authority, it would fail.

As a result, however, the resignation of their social worker

consequently forced the JCCSC to depend on the city’s social security office. Since the 1970s, bilingual social workers have become a part of Japanese community social welfare service.\(^{31}\)

From the start, the JCCSC’s social service had depended on community-wide donations. In its first year, 1963, the “One-Dollar Donation” campaign was successful in raising more than four thousands dollars, exceeding the target by a thousand dollars.\(^{32}\) In the 1970s, its structure was transformed. After the “One-Dollar Donation” campaign, they year by year set the target higher – around ten thousand dollars –, but it was hard to hit the target until the Japanese corporations joined as the primary donor. In the late 1970s, the Japan Trader’s Club, an assembling organization of Japanese corporations in Los Angeles, donated from three to five thousands dollars each year.\(^{33}\) The average sum of donation per share rose from one dollar in 1963 to about sixty dollars in 1979 while the number of donations themselves declined from 4,000 to 500.\(^{34}\) The sum per share grew steadily much higher and the total amount easily exceeded the target, thanks to the active participation of Japanese corporations. In terms of community welfare, the corporate donation replaced the individual gift as Japanese corporations began to emerge in the economy of of Southern California.

III. Issei’s Culturalism

The Japanese Cultural Center

In a 1962 petition to recruit members for the Japanese Cultural Center, a section of the JCCSC, the surviving Issei leader Mukaeda, a chairman of the center, wrote as follows;

“There’s an old saying, ‘A culture never perishes even if the nation falls,’ which is a truth of all ages and civilizations. Historical facts proves this as modern Western civilization is based on ancient Jewish, Greek and Roman culture. Chinese culture thrives beyond the life and death of hundreds of dynasties, and in recent times, the rehabilitation of vanquished nations – Japan and Germany – have sprung from their own cultural activities.”\(^{35}\)

The Japanese Cultural Center was formed in the early 1960s, and Mukaeda played a leading part in its formation and management. His interest and devotion to cultural activities went back to the prewar era. He belonged to the Japan America Society of Southern California and served as its president several times.\(^{36}\) Established at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Society had a membership that

\(^{31}\) Rafu Shimpo, 1 November 1975.
\(^{32}\) Rafu Shimpo, 27 December 1963.
\(^{34}\) Rafu Shimpo, November 29, 1979.
included both Japanese and Americans who shared an interest in cultural activities that indicated characteristics of the middle-class. Only high class government officials, businessmen, and other elite persons in the Japanese immigrant community attended the Society’s activities; they believed that such culture-based communications would deepen mutual understanding and eventually smooth bi-national relationships. Holding on to this belief in an unwavering fashion, Mukaeda was convinced that immigrant community leaders had a mission to introduce Japanese culture and implant it into the United States. By the same token, he had a mission to enlighten ordinary immigrants who lacked the middle-class manner and values so that they could be admitted in the U.S. society as civilized subjects. Culture was the key conception for a thrusting nationalism. The Japanese Cultural Center succeeded in promoting the idea even though it was only a small section of the JCCSC and its activities were tiny.

Whose Community Center?

In the late 1960s, the Japanese Cultural Center had the chance to expand. The project was accompanied by the redevelopment plan of the civic center of Los Angeles which was to be financed by federal budget. A community center project, as argued for and long-awaited by the whole community since before the war, attracted the attention of every generation. The planning committee was formed in 1969 under the Little Tokyo Development Advisory Committee, and consisted of Little Tokyo business and property owners. Mukaeda, as the committee chairman, put an emphasis on the basic idea of a cultural community center whereby Japanese immigrants were obliged to contribute to American culture by implanting aspects of Japanese culture. He quoted the examples of other Japanese immigrant community centers already built in Peru and Brazil, and said that he was planning to depend on the Japanese government and business circles for financial support.

In 1975, without any notice to local Japanese Americans, the name of the center was changed by the Issei leaders and the Prime Minister of Japan. Mukaeda and another old leader, George Doizaki, had a confidential meeting with the Prime Minister Miki Takeo to coordinate the plan of the center. They decided unilaterally that the new center should be named “The Bicentennial Anniversary’ Japanese American Cultural Center.” They removed “Community” from the original name, replacing it with ‘Bicentennial Anniversary,’ and according to Miki, the Japanese government was planning the center as a present to the United States to celebrate her anniversary. At that time, the two leaders and the Japanese government also planned the national fund-raising campaign. Doizaki attributed the change of the name as a means to facilitate of fund-raising in Japan, while a group of local Japanese Americans denounced it as a takeover by committee members, the Japanese government and corporations. In an open letter, a protest group of Nisei leaders

37) Azuma, Between Two Empires, 35-60.
38) Kashu Mainichi, 12 November 1969.
40) Kashu Mainichi, 10 July, 31 July 1975.
asked the Issei leaders, whom they thought of as the mastermind of the change, to hold a meeting of the entire community, inviting the Prime Minister to attend. Moreover, the group expressed its anxiety about the influence of the new name that emphasized “Japan”; in the 1970s Japanese corporations, growing unceasingly and spreading their influence over the U.S. market, had evoked a fresh tide of antipathy against local Japanese Americans in U.S. society.\(^{41}\)

Although the community-wide protest, led by the Nisei community organizers and intellectuals, succeeded in stopping Issei leaders from deleting “Community” from the center name, they realized, on examining the total financial structures of the center project, that the project owed much to the Japanese government and business circles in Japan as well as to U.S.-affiliated Japanese corporations. Roughly, a sum of five million dollars was collected from the Japan-related sources: 245 corporations, central and local governments in Japan,\(^{42}\) and 43 Japanese corporations in Southern California through the Japan Business Association, formerly called the Japan Traders Club.\(^{43}\) Two million came from Federal government through the Community Redevelopment Agency, which would have been the original financial basis for the redevelopment project of Little Tokyo. Another three million dollars was financed by the U.S. corporations and foundations through a philanthropist Franklin D. Murphy. Although the sources the original financial plan was at a ratio of four in Japan to six in the United States, remainder of the cost still depended for the most part on Japanese.

Three key figures arranged the big fund-raising campaigns in Japan; Ushijima, a prewar Japanese ambassador to the U.S., Shintaro Fukushima, the president of “The Japan Times,” and Zinhachiro Hanamura, an executive director of Keidanren [the Japanese Federation of Economic Organizations]. The former two voluntarily undertook the task because both had close relations with Japanese immigrant community in Southern California, as Mukaeda and other Issei leaders personally identified with them.\(^{44}\) Since Fukushima was also Japanese Consul in prewar Los Angeles, he and Fukushima belonged to a high class of Japanese immigrant society, which linked them with Mukaeda, a leader throughout the century.

**Analysis of the Conferment System**

Another factor which articulated Japan with Japanese immigrant society was the conferment system [*Jokun Award*]. The Japanese government had conferred medals of honor, stratified by social class, classes on Japanese immigrants all over the world as well as on domestic figures who had made a significant contribution in the realms of political, economic and cultural life. In 1958, Sachiko Fukusawa, an issei living in Southern California, was the first immigrant to receive the medal.\(^{45}\)


\(^{44}\) JACCC, *10th Anniversary*, 7-8.

During the war, she had organized female patriotic activities for sending relief money and supplies to her home country on behalf of the Federated Japanese Women’s Association of Southern California during the war time.\(^{46}\)

**Figure A. The Number of *Jokun* Medals Awarded to Japanese Immigrants in Southern California by Japanese Government, 1960-2000**

![Graph showing the number of Jokun Medals awarded from 1960 to 2000.](image)

Subsequently, the Japanese government conferred *Jokun* Medals on surviving old Japanese immigrants in postwar Southern California. **Figure A** illustrates the increasing number of the medals awarded between 1965 and 1984, a time of Japan’s economic recovery, as Japanese corporations began to exert their influence over the U.S. market. It was also the time when Japanese corporations and the Japanese government increasingly intervened in the Little Tokyo Redevelopment Project; the first modern, high-rise building in Little Tokyo was constructed by Kajima International in 1967, and a gorgeous hotel was also built by them in 1975.

In Southern California the awardwinners can be divided into two categories: 1) Those who had served as the leader or executive member of some organizations – the JCCSC, the Japan America Society, the Cultural Center, the Pioneer Center, the Japanese American Women’s Club, Kenjinkai, and so on; 2) those who had worked in cultural fields – the Japanese language and the Japanese arts, such as flower arrangement, dancing, calligraphy and fencing.

The members of the JCCSC who had served as the head or executives, dominated the field: as good as half the number among more than one hundred conferees of the first category. For all in small number in the second categories – 10 of total 118 – the number of the conferees related to such cultural organizations as the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center add up to one-fourth of the

The conferees amongst JCCSC members also dominated the higher stratum in preference to other organization members. By 2000 only three awards of the highest rank had gone to members of the immigrant society — one was Mukaeda who received two Medals, in 1960 and 1970; another was Kenji Ito, a Nisei lawyer, who was considered Mukaeda’s successor, since he served as the head of the JCCSC five times, while the other was John Aiso, the first Japanese American colonel in the U.S. army, later becoming a judge of California State. The second highest rank of conferees constituted those who had served as JCCSC head and executive members of the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center.

We have noted that conferees had been conventionally obliged to pay their recommenders some money in return: honor and private interests are interconnected, which can also explain why the confernement system continued for such a long time. Yet, at the second conferment in 1970, Mukaeda broke with the convention; he donated all the amount that he had to pay his recommender to the JCCSC’s social welfare section instead. He himself explained that the returning convention made transfers only between the concerned parties and made no profit throughout society as a whole.

Conclusion

This paper has set out to show how the Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Southern California acted as a link between the prewar and the postwar Japanese American experiences, and its focus on the JCCSC from a historical perspective can explain the reasons behind a series of postwar Japanese American community issues.

The JCCSC, actually replacing the Central Japanese Association, facilitated the link between Japan and the Japanese American community during the postwar period through the ties that Issei leaders shared with leaders in Japan. On regaining their status as authorities, Issei leaders tried to reintroduce into the postwar Japanese American community their old ways of dealing with community issues and their unshakeable belief in their old values. This bred conflicts such as the intergenerational tensions in the local community which were sometimes intertwined with the interests of the homeland beyond the national borders.

Eventually, however, the JCCSC’s tasks and functions were dispersed as other organizations were formed and succeeded them. The Cultural Center was merged into the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center, its social welfare department became the Pioneer Center, and its trade department was replaced by the Japan Business Association. The only task left to them was holding of a celebration for the Jokun Medal conferees, even though the number of conferees plummeted in


the 1990s when the significance of Southern California in the strategy of Japanese politics and businesses relatively declined.

Although the Issei were finally able to obtain their naturalization rights in the 1950s, the surviving first generation Japanese never abandoned the tools that identified them as Japanese. As Mukaeda devoted himself to implanting “Japanese culture” into America and the descendents of the immigrants, Issei leaders clung to the dream of identifying themselves as culturally and racially from Japan. They craved to be awarded Jokun Medals by the Japanese government; the conferment system was an essential part of the postwar Japanese American community desire to preserve the transnational ties that they had inherited from the prewar era. What tied the knot between them shifted from something political to something cultural, as embodied by the Cultural Center and the Jokun Medal.

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NOTE

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